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ABSTRACT

An elementary school principal implemented a practicum to improve school-home communication at a school where administrators believed that a history of poor communication between parents and teachers negatively influenced the school's academic and parent involvement programs. Specific practicum goals were to improve: (1) school-home communication to a level perceived as satisfactory by 70 percent of the parents; and (2) the school-home relationship through the implementation of a targeted written and personal communication program. The program focused on developing processes that would improve school-home communication through written and personal approaches with parents. Results were positive. Related materials, including a parent attitude survey, a school-to-home communication survey, a staff survey on the school-home communication program, a grade-level newsletter information collection form, a teleconference documentation form, and an outline of 10 teacher training sessions. (RH)

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PRACTICUM REPORT

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Improving Communication with Elementary
School Parents Through a Targeted Communi-
cations Program Involving Classroom
Teachers and the Principal

by

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Improving Communication with Elementary School Parents
Through a Targeted Communications Program
Involving Classroom Teachers and the Principal

by

Donald M. Richardson

Cluster XIX

A Practicum II Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
In Early and Middle Childhood
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1988

PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

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This practicum report was submitted by Donald M. Richardson under the direction of the Advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

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12-8-88
Date of Final Approval of Report

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
Chapter	
I Introduction.....	1
Setting.....	1
Instructional Staff.....	3
Parents.....	4
Writer.....	5
II Study of the Problem.....	7
Problem Situation.....	7
Problem Statement.....	7
Problem Documentation.....	8
Causative Analysis.....	10
The Related Literature.....	16
III Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments...21	
General Goal.....	21
Specific Objectives.....	21
Evaluation Instruments for Analysis of Data.....	22
IV Solution Strategy.....	24
Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions.....	24
Description of Selected Solution.....	29
Report of the Action Taken.....	38
V Results, Conclusions and Recommendations.....	43
References.....	55
Appendices	
A Parent Survey.....	58
B Parent Communication Survey.....	61
C Staff Survey.....	70
D Grade Level Newsletter Information Collection Form.....	75
E Tele-Conference Documentation Form.....	77
F Teacher Training Sessions Outline.....	79

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Improvement in School-Home Communication.....	45
2	Improvement in School-Home Relationship.....	47

ABSTRACT

Improving Communication with Elementary Parents through a Targeted Communications Program Involving Classroom Teachers and the Principal. Richardson, Donald M., 1988: Practicum Report, Nova University Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood.

Descriptors: Family-School Relationship/ Parent-School Relationship/ Parent-Teacher Cooperation/ School-Community Relationship/ Improvement Programs/ Improvement Programs/ Parent-Teacher Conferences.

This practicum focused on improving school-home communication. The historical lack of a comprehensive and targeted school-home communication program was the primary causal factor the existence of this problem. In a review of the literature the writer found that communication programs which addressed the specific communication needs of parents had been successfully implemented at the elementary school level and utilized written and personal approaches to communication.

The writer's goals were: (1) to improve school-home communication to a level perceived by 70% of the parents to be satisfactory, and (2) to improve the school-home relationship through the implementation of a targeted written and personal communication program. In addressing these goals the writer developed and facilitated the presentation of a targeted training program for teachers which focused on developing processes which would improve school-home communication through written and personal approaches with parents.

The results of this practicum indicated that both practicum goals were successfully achieved. There were also several positive concomitant outcomes associated with the solution strategy implemented in the practicum.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Setting

The setting for this major practicum was a 700 student elementary school (grades K-5) located in the greater central Florida area. The school is 29 years old and has an adequate physical plant which is well maintained. The student population of the school is drawn from a five square mile catchment area which includes residential and commercial property. The community served by the school is most appropriately defined as lower-middle income and 57% of the students are Caucasian and 43% of the students are Hispanic. Approximately 470 students received free or reduced lunches during the 1987-88 school year, based on the income eligibility of their parents.

The school staff consists of 44 instructional personnel (39 females, 5 males) and 27 support or non-instructional personnel (24 females and 3 males). The principal is the only administrator assigned to the school. There are 26 regular classroom teachers at the school. The average age of the instructional staff is 42 and the average number of years of teaching experience is 14. Approximately 30% of the instructional staff have earned graduate degrees. According to the district personnel office, there is not a significant teacher turnover rate at the school.

There have been five principals employed at the school in the last 12 years. Most of these principals were near retirement age and finished their educational careers in the

principalship at the school. Due to the changes in the principalship, the school's mission, goals, objectives, programs and procedures have not been consistent. The elementary school where the practicum took place, historically, has not had a high degree of parental involvement in school activities and functions such as the P.T.A. and the school volunteer program. The central office administrator who supervises the school believed that the parents whose children are served by the school, had not developed a sense of ownership in the school and that there had been a significant lack of appropriate and adequate school-home communication. The central office administrator believed the weakness in the school-home communication link negatively impacted the effectiveness of the academic program and the parent involvement program, as she believed that parents didn't perceive the school as belonging to them.

Results from the annual parent surveys from the past three years indicated that school-home communication was an area of desired improvement. The lack of appropriate and adequate school-home communication was ranked by parents as the second highest area of concern, behind individualized attention given to students, during the past three years. It may be that the perceived lack of individualized attention given students was related to the school-home communication perception held by parents.

Approximately 80% of the instructional staff believed

that the school was providing parents with adequate communication. This perception stood in stark contrast to the parental perception relating to communication. The only consistent mechanism for achieving school-home communication had been the monthly newsletter sent home by the principal. The newsletter typically included a lunch menu, a calendar of upcoming events, and a P.T.A. column. The format of the newsletter had not changed significantly over time.

The central office administrator firmly believed that the establishment of a comprehensive communication link with parents was an important step in moving the school toward full implementation of the effective school model and in modifying the previously existing school climate.

Instructional Staff

There are 44 instructional staff members, with 26 being classroom teachers, at this school. The average length of teaching experience of the instructional staff is 14 years. Nearly 30% have earned graduate degrees, with 75% of those possessing graduate degrees having a masters degree in administration and supervision.

The instructional staff is predominately female and Caucasian. The staff did not have a consistent pattern of leadership due to the high turnover rate in the principalship. In terms of instructional patterns, basic skills were focused on much more than enrichment-oriented activities. The emphasis on basic skills led to test scores which were at or above the district average on both the

State Student Assessment Test and the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills.

The staff firmly believed that they were doing "a good job" of teaching the basics to the students. They felt that school-home communication was adequate and that in most cases parents were not as involved in their child's education as was necessary. The staff believed that the test scores obtained at the school were the singular result of their efforts. The staff's set of beliefs may have impacted the school-home communication provided, as a "we are going it alone" attitude appeared to exist.

Parents

The majority of parents, of the students who attend the school, are lower-middle income and could be generally termed "blue collar" in terms of occupations.

The parent population is 43% Hispanic and 57% Caucasian. Approximately 41% are single, (Female) working parents and 39% of those who returned the 87-88 annual parent survey indicated that they had not had a conference with their child's teacher.

Parent participation in the P.T.A. and the school volunteer program was extremely limited and it was often difficult to get parents to serve as field trip chaperones and homeroom parents.

The parents who returned the 1986-87 annual survey (54% returned the survey) felt that school-home communication was lacking in general. The monthly newsletter was rated as being helpful, but more information on activities,

procedures, policies, programs and staff members was desired. More opportunities for direct and personal contact was also an area of desired improvement parents rated as being high in priority.

Writer

The writer is a male Caucasian who was appointed principal of this particular elementary school in February of 1987. Prior to assuming this principalship, the writer was an assistant principal at two other elementary schools, a guidance counselor and a classroom teacher at the elementary school level.

The writer has 12 years of professional experience in the district he is currently employed in and has successfully completed the Preparing New Principal's Program which led to certification as a school principal and in educational leadership. Currently, the writer belongs to several professional organizations (American Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Florida Association of School Administrators, National Elementary School Principal's Association, Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Delta Kappa) and is an active member of the local Phi Delta Kappa chapter.

The philosophy the writer subscribes to, relative to the principalship, is one based on providing effective leadership and one which emphasizes the welfare of the child as being the primary reason for the institution to exist.

A careful and systematic assessment of school

strengths, weaknesses, needs and resources was conducted by the writer (following the effective school model of assessment) and action plans were developed and implemented in response to the outcomes of the school assessment.

The writer spends an average of 50 hours per week in duties related to the principalship. The writer is the only administrator at the school and performs the total array of administrative and supervisory duties required by the district (scheduling, personnel management, assessment, resource management, instructional leadership, parent/community relations, planning, discipline and office operations).

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Situation

The problem situation which existed at the writer's setting was characterized by: (1) a lack of adequate and comprehensive school-home communication, as the monthly newsletter developed solely by the principal had been the primary mechanism for facilitating communication, (2) the limited information communicated to parents through the monthly newsletter, typically pertained to the menu, the school calendar (e.g., field trips, school pictures, holidays) and P.T.A. information, (3) the lack of involvement of the instructional staff in assisting the principal with school-home communications, (4) the lack of involvement of the instructional staff in providing parents with written and personal communication relating to general school information, (5) the general perception held by the parents that the communication link was inadequate and not comprehensive, (6) the general perception held by the instructional staff that the school was providing adequate school-home communication, and (7) a school-community relationship which was not healthy.

Problem Statement

The problem that the practicum focused on solving was that of inadequate communication between the school and the home.

Documentation and Evidence of the Problem

The documentation that was presented as evidence of the existence and appropriateness of this problem (in relation to practicum problem criteria) includes the four following elements.

(1) Results from the 1984-85 and 1985-86 annual parent surveys indicated that school-home communication (including written and personal communication) was rated as the second highest area needing improvement.

(2) Results from the 1986-87 parent survey indicated that 7% of the respondents were "very satisfied" with the monthly newsletter, 29% of the respondents were "generally satisfied" with the monthly newsletter, 44% of the respondents were "generally dissatisfied" with the monthly newsletter, and 20% of the respondents were "very dissatisfied" with the monthly newsletter. (See appendix A)

(3) The central office administrator whom the writer reported to and was evaluated by (the Elementary Director, Area IV), believed that the lack of adequate and comprehensive school-home communication was a "major roadblock to overcome if the school was to be truly effective in realizing its total mission. The central office administrator further believed that the general perception held by the parents, relating to the inadequacy of school-home communication, was a valid perception in light of the historical lack of any comprehensive and on-going school-home communication program.

(4) The instructional staff did not participate in the

development of any school-wide communications as previous principals were content to maintain the status quo because they simply lacked the "professional energy" to undertake a comprehensive plan of action to address these clearly identified needs.

This lack of leadership in the communication area fostered negative feelings in parents, as they felt that their collective need for school information and for input was not responded to or valued by the school. The lack of strong leadership had significantly strained the relationship between the school and the parent body. Feeling that their needs were being ignored or discounted by the school, the general parental perception which developed was that the school existed to meet its own singularly defined needs and that it really didn't value the needs of parents and the community. The writer worked diligently to modify the status of the parent-school relationship by assessing community and parental needs and, with community and staff input, developed strategies to address these needs. The strategies which were implemented were designed to establish a sense of basic trust in the parents and in the community relative to the school. In the time span that the writer served as principal, this critical relationship was steadily improved, as a sense of basic trust was established through the new initiatives introduced. These initiatives led to the formation and operationalization of a Local School Advisory Council, increased participation on the P.T.A.

Executive Board, the establishment of a functional Partners in Education Program with the business community, and in parent education and adult education classes being offered at the school (in response to identified parental and community needs). The writer worked closely with the school staff to modify attitudes and behavior in regard to the community and parents.

Analysis of the Causes of the Problem

In analyzing the school-home communication problem to ascertain its probable causal factors, the writer conducted individual interviews with each grade chairperson (teacher), the school secretary, the school's district-level supervisor and members of the Local School Advisory Council to gather direct input on the problem from differing perspectives. The writer also spent an extensive amount of time reviewing school files which housed previous communication documents utilized by previous principals to communicate with parents and the community. This analytic methodology yielded findings which clearly indicated that there were four primary probable causes to this particular problem.

- (1) The historical lack of consistency in leadership, by the principal, in the area of school-home communication was due to the high rate of change in the principalship.
- (2) The reliance on the monthly newsletter, developed solely by the principal, as the only mechanism for facilitating school-home communication.
- (3) The limited types of information communicated to parents, which tended to reflect the status of the

school-home relationship.

- (4) The general perception held by the instructional staff that the historical (limited) approach to school-home communication was adequate.

In relation to causal factor number one (rapid change in the principalship, which led to a lack of leadership in the communication area) school-home communication had suffered due to the school having five principals in the last twelve years. The writer was the fifth principal and was the only one who was not near retirement age. The central office administrator who was responsible for this school believed that there was a definite lack of leadership on the part of previous principals, as the concern over school-home communications had been clearly identified and was on-going, yet little action had been planned or taken. Steady progress was observed in the general attitude and level of sensitivity of the staff toward the community and the parent body, as a theme of partnership was stressed by the writer upon assuming the principalship. Policies and practices which required and fostered closer cooperation with parents and the community were made operational due to the joint efforts of the writer and the faculty advisory committee. The staff and the community made significant progress in developing a sense of trust toward one another and the once dominant adverse tone was replaced by more of a climate of partnership.

In relation to causal factor number two (the reliance

on the monthly newsletter, developed by the principal, as the primary communication mechanism) it was apparent that the monthly newsletter had been the primary on-going communication mechanism for at least the last nine years. In reviewing school files it was determined that occasional special bulletins, notices, letters and information sheets were sent home to parents (in the past) however, there was no plan in-place to facilitate comprehensive and on-going communication.

The monthly newsletter had been prepared by each principal and had some variance in content and format, but had not changed significantly over time according to the school secretary.

Results from the 1986-87 parent survey indicated that 64% of the respondents were not satisfied with the monthly newsletter and that its lack of comprehensiveness and monthly schedule of distribution were cited as areas of concern. Parents felt ignored, as they received such sparse school information and were afforded so few opportunities for giving meaningful input. Parents and the community were given increased opportunities for sharing meaningful input, as the establishment of a Local School Advisory Council was accomplished and it met on a monthly basis and became involved in budgeting and resource allocation decisions, program and policy decisions, and in the planning and evaluation processes. The writer organized informal area parent meetings for each of the areas the school served and held area meetings with the Hispanic parents (conducted in

Spanish). The focus of these area meetings was to develop basic trust with the parents, listen to concerns, gather input and establish a working relationship based on the premise that parents can and should impact the educational process their children are exposed to each day.

The writer expanded upon the jointly determined themes of partnership and involvement, and improvement in these areas increased both quantitatively and qualitatively. The writer believed that an increased sense of parental partnership and involvement was prerequisite prior to working on improving school-home communications. Parents would be able to better utilize the array of information they were going to receive and they would feel comfortable in two-way communications, if they felt they were an integral part of the educational process of the school.

In relation to causal factor number three (the limited types of information communicated to parents) the types of information communicated to parents (through the newsletter) had been primarily limited to the school menu for the upcoming month, the school activity calendar for the upcoming month and sometimes a short narrative section on any P.T.A. or general school activities. Significant numbers of parents desired information on district and school policies and procedures, special programs offered at the school, staff and personnel, test scores, report card guidelines, promotion and retention, and discipline practices. The school secretary stated that these areas had

been of interest to parents, historically, and that no significant proactive attempt was made to address these areas other than through telephone calls or conferences. This approach was clearly reactive, as the need had been identified and was apparently on-going. The lack of proactivity in this area led to chronic misperceptions, much conflict and a prevailing parental sense that the school was more of a "closed" rather than an "open" institution, and that they (parents) could not impact this system.

The perception held by previous administrators at the school was, the less parents knew, the better off the school was in the long run. The newsletter clearly reflected this type of thinking and the staff followed the negative and closed tone set by these administrators. The school newsletter was acutely symptomatic of the previously existing school-home relationship with its closed nature and tended to confirm their (parents) belief that a hidden agenda of parental mistrust was held by the school.

In relation to causal factor number four (the perception held by the instructional staff that school-home communication was adequate) the instructional staff had not consistently demonstrated a sense of ownership in the communication issue and tended to believe that the principal was solely responsible for school-home communication. The instructional staff tended to keep parents adequately informed about the individual academic and social progress of students, but they tended not to perceive the need for an integrated school-wide communication system with parents as

a group and as individuals with specific concerns.

The instructional staff generally had not had the opportunity to actively participate in school-wide initiatives and the writer carefully involved them in such initiatives, after working to establish an awareness of the existence of the problem and the ramifications this problem presented.

The instructional staff was generally surprised that parents perceived the communications issue so unfavorably, as most felt that they were communicating adequately. The staff reaction to the results of the parent survey, relative to communication, was clearly indicative of the previously existing mind-set of "we are going it alone". The partnership theme was stressed by the principal in planning and decision-making processes and the staff came to realize that a partnership relationship with parents and the community was also very much needed.

The instructional staff made much progress in the broad area of improving school-home relations, but their involvement in the process was still not at a satisfactory level. Partnership and involvement with parents was stressed and parents were invited in for class plays and programs, and evening performances were scheduled to better accomodate working parents. Evening parent conferences were scheduled each semester. Parents were utilized as chaperones and an entire career education fair was developed which utilized parents exclusively. A "meet your teacher"

day was implemented prior to the start of the 1987-88 and 1988-89 school year(s). The instructional staff became more comfortable with increased parental involvement, as the benefit to children was readily apparent. The prerequisite groundwork for increased, varied and improved communication with parents was set and the staff appeared to be at the point where they could accept and support further initiatives in this area.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The problem which this practicum focused on solving was examined in relation to the professional literature. The review of the literature relating to the problem of inadequate communication between the school and the home indicated that : 1) inadequate school-home communication was a documented educational problem, 2) various models for improving the school-home communication link existed and their applicability depended greatly on the specific needs of each situation, and 3) the relationship between the school and the home could be improved and strengthened if open and two-way communication existed between the school and parents.

Inadequate Communication as an Educational Problem

Research conducted by McAfee (1984) indicated that public school parents, as a group, generally do not consider themselves to be particularly well informed about what the schools are accomplishing or about the needs of the school. McAfee also found that poor communication with parents was

prevalent and that the lack of a comprehensive program of school-home communications, written and personal, was common.

Improving Communication with Parents

A study conducted by Truby (1987) indicated that a carefully planned program of school-home communications could increase parent involvement in school activities and in the educational program offered by the school. Written and personal communications with parents were identified as potentially effective mechanisms which could be used to help develop a school-home communication program.

Action research conducted by Paulas (1985) relating to improving support for public schools indicated that a school-wide program of communications with parents could positively impact the level of support the school receives. One comprehensive model of a school-home communication program included the use of a principal's newsletter, telephone contacts, notes to parents, parent visits, and parent lunches. This program improved the parent and community support received by the school.

In communicating with parents it is necessary to consider which types of information are desired and how to best meet these identified information needs. Barclay (1977) found that parents generally wanted to receive information on major administrative and policy decisions, the financial status of the school, the special problems facing the school, and to have increased opportunities for

meaningful involvement and input. Barclay's research indicated that written, as well as other forms of personal communication, were effective in communicating the desired information to parents. The type or combination of communication strategies employed needs to be geared to the specific needs of each school and parent body.

Moles (1987) found that the role of open communications with parents and the community was critical to the school developing an atmosphere where school-home collaboration could develop. Communication with parents and the community needs to include on-going distribution of relevant information and structured opportunities for parents to have direct input and involvement.

Educators working in the school-home communications area have found evidence which indicates that improved school-home relations, in large part, depend on the use of effective communication strategies by the school (Gotts and Purnell, 1985). Gotts and Purnell maintain that written and personal communication strategies can be effective if they are utilized appropriately according to the specific and unique needs and variables present in the existing school-community relationship.

Improving the School-Home Relationship through Communication

A major finding of the Delaware Governor's Task Force on Education for Economic Growth (1984) was that increased parental and community involvement was essential to the school improvement process. The role of school-home communications, in the parental involvement process,

was identified as a variable that the local school unit could impact through the utilization of a planned program of open communications.

Pitts (1982) found that the elementary school principal could impact the school-parent relationship through the implementation of a communications improvement program. The use of written and personal communications in the relationship improvement process were highlighted as key components in the process.

Brookover (1982) conducted research on creating effective schools and authored a book, based on his findings, with applications for practitioners. Brookover identified increased parental involvement as one of the critical variables in the school improvement process. The importance of sound school-home communications was noted as being foundational to the development of a school climate which encourages parental and community involvement.

Chaukin and Williams (1987) surveyed parents and school administrators about attitudes, practices, and policies relative to parent involvement at the elementary school level. Survey findings indicated that increased parental involvement was a goal for both groups and that improving communications with parents was necessary to make the involvement to be useful to the school in realizing its goals and in facilitating meaningful parent involvement.

The importance of parents perceiving themselves as being partners in the educational process was examined by

Austin (1981). The results of this effective school research project indicated that parents needed to be communicated with consistently, if they were going to become meaningfully involved and move more toward a partnership relationship with the school. Communication strategies which appeared to be effective included direct and personal involvement approaches, as well as written approaches.

Epstein (1987) conducted an extensive review of the literature relating to the impact of parent involvement on the educational process. Epstein identified school-home communication as a critical variable in establishing an atmosphere where parental involvement could be developed. Epstein noted the important role the school principal played in establishing a sound program of school-home communications. The importance of a comprehensive and ongoing program of communications between parents and the school was noted as being an integral part of the total communications process.

The review of the related literature indicated that:

- (1) inadequate school-home communication was a significant educational problem,
- (2) communication enhancement models which emphasized written and interactive elements could be effective in the improvement of the communication link between the school and parents, and
- (3) an effective communication program could positively impact the status of the relationship and overall climate of trust which exists between the school and the home.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

OVERVIEW

The problem this practicum focused on solving was that of inadequate school-home communication. The general goal and specific objectives outlined in this chapter relate specifically to the documentation and evidence of the problem presented in Chapter II.

General Goal

The general goal for this practicum was a projected statement of practicum outcome expectations and was that school-home communication would be improved to a level perceived by parents to be satisfactory.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives for the practicum were derived from the broader general goal and were precise and measurable statements of outcome expectations.

Objective One

Outcome Expectation: To improve school-home communication to a level perceived by parents as being satisfactory.

Evaluation Tool: The 1987-88 school-home parent survey was designed to serve as the evaluative tool used to assess the adequacy of school-home communication. The area of school-home communication constituted an entire subsection of the annual parent survey and included Likert scale ratings and opportunities for narrative and evaluative input. (See Appendix B)

Standard of Achievement: Results from the 1987-88 annual parent survey were projected to indicate that 70% of the responding parents would rate, via the Likert scale ratings, school-home communication as being generally satisfactory or very satisfactory.

Objective Two

Outcome Expectation: To improve the school-home relationship.

Assessment Instrument: The 1987-88 annual parent survey was designed to serve as the evaluative tool used to assess the perceived degree of improvement in the school-home relationship, specifically in regard to the communications aspect.

Standard of Achievement: Results from the 1987-88 annual parent survey were projected indicate that 70% of the responding parents would rate, via the Likert scale ratings, the school-home relationship as being improved. (See Appendix B)

Plans for Analyzing the Data

To determine whether or not the specific objectives of the practicum were achieved, the following analytic strategies were planned to be utilized in the analysis of outcomes.

(Objective #1) The results from the 1987-88 annual parent survey were to be analyzed, by hand, by the writer to determine if 70% of the responding parents rated school-home communication, on the Likert scale included in the survey, as being generally satisfactory or very satisfactory. All annual parent surveys returned to the school, were to be

analyzed by the writer, to determine the percent of parents who rated school-home communication as being satisfactory or very satisfactory. The results of this analysis were to be described in a narrative format and portrayed via a pie chart which correlated to the results obtained in the Likert scale ratings for each item on the survey.

(Objective #2) The results from the 1987-88 annual parent survey were to be analyzed, by hand, by the writer to determine if 70% of the responding parents rated the school-home relationship as being improved, via the school-home communications program. The results of this analysis were to be described in a narrative format and portrayed via a pie chart which correlated to the results obtained in response to this item.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

This chapter of the practicum report has several major purposes including: (1) the identification and evaluation of potential solution strategies found in the literature, (2) the designation and justification of the selected solution strategy which was creative in the writer's work setting and logically related to the problem characteristics and inferred causes of the problem, and (3) the presentation of a detailed plan on the action taken (the solution strategy) in terms of precise procedures and time frames.

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The Practicum Guide states that potential solution strategies (found in the literature) which have been attempted by others facing a similar problem must be explored and evaluated in light of the specific needs and goals of the practicum.

The problem focused on in this practicum (inadequate school-home communication) has been addressed by various factions of the professional education community. It appears, based on the review of the related literature, that improved school-home communication was a critical element in a total school improvement program.

School-home communication programs at the elementary school level, which are continuous and comprehensive, have been generally perceived by parents as making a difference in the quality of education received by their child and in the degree of parental involvement in the educational

process, according to Barclay (1977).

Survey research conducted by Gotts and Purnell (1985) indicated that public school parents, as a group, do not consider themselves as being particularly well informed. The survey parents who believed that they were well informed reported that an on-going program of group and individual communications was in-place. Gotts and Purnell further maintained, that parents needed to be well informed, on individual and group issues, if an effective school-home relationship was to be developed and maintained.

The specific causal factors relating to the practicum problem clearly suggested that parents did not perceive themselves as being well informed by the school and that the school-home relationship had been adversely impacted to some degree by this chronic lack of information and communication. The communication improvement process and relationship development process appeared to be linked and it seemed essential that an on-going and comprehensive school-home communication program be implemented in order to develop and reinforce the school-home relationship.

The specific dynamics involved in the problem situation required that systematic mechanisms be developed to inform and communicate with parents, prior to the consideration of potential solution strategies which were based on an existing (adequate) information and communication base and on an effective school-home relationship.

Solution strategies which were based on the existence

of adequate and on-going communication mechanisms were not appropriate for the problem focused on in the practicum, as there was significant dissimilarity of causation, goals and objectives, and problem focus.

It became apparent that potential solution strategies which presumed the existence of adequate, comprehensive, and on-going school-home communication systems with parents were not appropriate for the scope of the practicum.

The variables associated with the problem required that the development of an adequate, comprehensive, and on-going school-home communication system be examined, as it was prerequisite to the future development of a total communication system with parents.

The basic communication elements involved were numerous and it appeared that focusing on targeted written and personal strategies was the most feasible approach, had a high potential for success, and established the groundwork for future enhancement of the school-home communication link and relationship.

Based on the above outlined rationale, the literature was carefully reviewed to analyze what types of potential solution strategies, which focused on the specific areas of written and personal school-home communications, had been attempted by others facing a similar problem.

Gotts and Purnell (1985) developed a Phi Delta Kappa Fastback on improving school-home communications. They outlined five primary methods for improving school-to-home communications which included: the effective use of

newsletters, handbooks, open houses, informational pamphlets and the use of parent organizations as a communication mechanism. Gotts and Purnell further asserted that these strategies were effective methodologies for sharing information about school programs, activities, schedules, policies, procedures, accomplishments and needs.

The newsletter, handbook, informational packets and parental meetings were the primary mechanisms Bagin, Grazian, and Harrison (1983) found to be most effective in communicating with elementary school parents, in relation to matters of general school interest.

The educational impact of effective school-home communication was examined by the McAfee (1984). McAfee's research indicated that the establishment of effective school-home communications was the foundational step in the process of facilitating parental involvement in the educational process. (This was the premise from which potential solution strategies were examined and evaluated.) McAfee further believed that written and personal communication with parents was critical, as important school information could be transmitted very effectively if the specific communication strategies utilized were carefully planned and targeted to the needs of parents and the community.

Marochie and Jones (1987) found that written communication with the home was a most inexpensive and effective way to link the school with the home. Carefully

planned programs of written school-home communication, in conjunction with a program of planned personal contact about individual needs and strengths, appears to have positively impacted the school-home relationship.

The Education Commission of the States (1979) found that schools are generally perceived by parents as being more open and effective when school-home communication is targeted, consistent and utilizes a wide range of strategies to inform parents about school needs, programs, accomplishments and activities. Written communication strategies were found to be effective in accomplishing this set of specific objectives, if the strategies were tailored to the specific situation and the needs of the parents and school. The information conveyed to parents through the written strategies needed to be more than propaganda and needed to be targeted to the information needs of the specific parental group and school. Personal communication strategies were found to be effective in developing rapport with parents.

The Ohio State Department of Education (1984) conducted a study on the characteristics of successful urban schools and found that an effective and comprehensive community relations program was a critical variable associated with successful schools. The utilization of targeted and ongoing communication strategies with parents and community members was identified as one of the indicators associated with successful relations with parents and the community.

Solution strategies such as those described above

correlated highly to the problem, causal factors, and objectives of the practicum. The review of the related literature indicated that a carefully planned, informationally targeted, comprehensive and on-going school-home communications program could and, based on the results reported by others, had improved the relationship between school and home, helped to establish a sense of parental awareness and ownership toward the school, and was associated with increased parental involvement.

The review of potential solution strategies which addressed school-home communication mechanisms indicated that several strategies were found to be effective, as long as they focused on targeted areas of interest and concern, were specifically geared to the information needs of parents and allowed for meaningful parental input.

The utilization of a comprehensive, targeted and on-going school-home communication program (written and personal) appeared to have a high degree of likelihood of solving the problem addressed in the practicum, as there was an apparent and significant similarity in the presenting problem and its accompanying dynamics, and with the outcomes generally associated with solution strategies of this nature.

Description of Selected Solution

The solution strategy which was implemented to solve the problem focused on in the practicum was designed to address the inferred problem characteristics and causal factors and was projected to increase the likelihood

that practicum goals and objectives would be achieved as projected.

Based on the potential solution strategies identified and analyzed in the review of the related literature, it became clear that strategies which were based on the existence of a solid and operational school-home communication and information link were not appropriate, even though they were clearly more creative. The problem situation, causal factors and resultant goals and objectives needed to focus on establishing a two-way school-home communication link, from which the groundwork for an improved school-home relationship could be developed.

The review of the related literature was clear in that an effective school-home (written and personal) communication program could improve the flow of school information to parents, facilitate school-parent interaction and to some degree positively impact the school-home relationship. In the future this would allow more creative communication strategies to be implemented, as an atmosphere of ownership and trust would have been established through the solution strategy.

The solution strategy which was implemented was a foundationally requisite step in the process of improving school-home communications and the school-home relationship. The proposed solution strategy focused on developing the direct involvement of the instructional staff in a targeted written and personal communication improvement process with parents. Directly involving the instructional staff in

these written (weekly grade-level progress report, grade-level newsletter, open-house newsletter, parent-student handbook, annual school report) and personal (telephone mid-term conference and in the production of a video magazine which was shown at each P.T.A. meeting and open-house) communication strategies were clearly creative communication strategies in the work setting, as the instructional staff had never been involved in such a program and parents never had received these types of communication from the school.

Written Communication Strategies

The classroom instructional staff assisted in the development of a bi-weekly school newsletter edited by the practicum student, with the parent-student handbook, and with the annual school progress report.

The practicum student developed a training program designed to develop competencies in the classroom instructional staff which related to communicating effectively through specific written and personal strategies. The practicum student was responsible to develop, with staff input, and edit a bi-weekly school newsletter. The newsletter was translated into Spanish, by the bilingual team, and sent home to the Hispanic parents. There was a teacher from each grade level team K-5, exceptional education team, bilingual team and support area team (Art, Music, P.E.) on the newsletter committee which assisted the writer with the development of the bi-weekly

newsletter. The committee approach was clearly a creative approach to developing a newsletter at this particular school. The committee met with the practicum student two times each month to assist with the development of the newsletter.

The practicum student was also responsible for developing, with staff assistance and input, the parent-student handbook for the 1988-89 school year. Another committee of teachers with one representative from each instructional team (different from the newsletter team personnel) assisted with the development of a parent-student handbook which was an informative, comprehensive and creatively designed handbook. The parent-student handbook covered school policies, alphabetically, and presented important information in a clear and comprehensive manner. The handbook was in a folder format, was professionally printed and was given to parents to keep at home as a resource on school policies and practices. Previously, the parent-student handbook had been a five page typed document. Parents generally perceived this document as being non-communicative and unattractive in terms of format and presentation.

The writer was also responsible for developing, with staff assistance and input, the 1987-88 annual school progress report. A committee of teachers, with representatives from each instructional team (different from the newsletter and handbook committee personnel) assisted with the development of the annual school progress report

which was an informative, comprehensive and creatively designed document.

The annual school report covered all areas mandated by state statute; however, the report presented the required information in creative and innovative ways. The format of the report was redesigned so that the report was a positive communication tool for parents and the school community at large.

The annual school progress report had always been a very dry, numerical and non-creative document, and had not had a positive tone which would help foster parental awareness of achievements, needs and objectives. The classroom instructional staff was never involved in the development of the annual school progress report, indicating a lack of involvement in the total school program.

The practicum student was responsible for developing, with assistance from the summer 1988 extended day staff, the summer enrichment program newsletter which was sent home in June, July and August of 1988. The summer program newsletter was an innovative strategy as no such initiative had ever been attempted. The newsletters focused on program happenings, general program information and on other general items of interest to parents who had children enrolled in the program.

Personal Communication Strategies

The following strategies were utilized to enhance the direct involvement of the instructional staff in personal

communication processes with parents.

(1) The practicum student chaired a "video magazine" committee, which developed a video tape presentation for parents (on general and special school happenings) which was shown at each P.T.A. meeting and at each open-house. The video committee had staff representation from each team (K-5) of classroom teachers, from the special area teams, and from the bilingual and exceptional education teams. The video magazine committee was comprised of different personnel than the other communication committees. The school's cam-corder was utilized to develop the video magazine.

The curriculum resource teacher coordinated the taping, editing and production of the video magazine. The video presentations focused on the experiences students were encountering in their educational program and on sharing general school information via a unique medium (video).

The video magazine committee met each month to determine the content for each production. Each video presentation included graphics, music and a taped narrative script. Teachers and other staff members submitted ideas for video taping to the curriculum resource teacher at grade-level meetings held every other week.

(2) Each grading period at the mid-term point, (February & April) each classroom teacher contacted, by telephone, each parent (at home or work, depending on school/parental scheduling) to discuss the child's progress at that point in the grading period. Each parent was

requested, in the weekly progress report, to inform the classroom teacher of their desire to be called at home, at work, or if they would call the teacher. Times were arranged during the mid-term week for the telephone conferences. The teachers documented their tele-conferences and follow-up, via a note to the parents, after the telephone conference. The practicum student examined all telephone documentation logs each grading period. (See Appendix E)

The tele-conference included sharing of information on the child's progress in the academic, behavioral and effort areas. Each teacher shared something positive about the child, as well as one area which needed extra parental encouragement or assistance. The telephone conference further developed the school-home link and fostered the development of trust between the school and parents.

The array of strategies described personally involved the instructional staff and parents in the communication process, was supported in the literature as being an effective way to address written and personal communication with parents, was innovative in the setting and clearly addressed the larger affective and relationship issues which were associated with the communication process. The designated solution strategy logically and clearly related to and connected with the inferred causes of the problem.

The first workshop session of the teacher training program included an overview of the school-home

communications program, information, affective and relationship improvement objectives of the program and an overview of the strategies being implemented to facilitate teacher and parent involvement. The link between improved communications and an improved school-home relationship was stressed. The written and personal communication program was the first step in the process of improving the total communication network with parents and with the broader long range goal of increased parental involvement.

The second workshop session dealt with the development of a meaningful and communicative bi-weekly school newsletter. A school newsletter committee comprised of teachers worked with the writer in the planning and development of the bi-weekly school newsletter.

The third workshop focused on developing a weekly grade-level progress report. Specific attention was focused on achieving grade-level consensus in terms of format and how achievement, conduct and effort would be judged and communicated to parents.

The fourth workshop dealt with the video magazine project. Specific attention was focused on project purposes, responsibilities and production logistics.

Workshop session five addressed the mid-term telephone conference. The purposes of the tele-conference, conference structure, scheduling, documentation and follow-up were examined.

The sixth workshop session dealt with the grade-level newsletter, which accompanied the second, third and fourth

quin (87-88) report card. The grade-level newsletter highlighted key concepts covered in the content areas, special activities and events, enrichment activities and general information of interest to parents of students at the particular grade level. The practicum student developed a structured form from which the grade-level newsletter was developed. (See Appendix D)

Workshop session number seven dealt with the open-house newsletter. There was a second semester (February, 1988) open-house and a fall (September, 1988) open-house for parents. The workshop session highlighted the purposes, content and format of the open-house newsletter.

The eighth workshop session focused on developing a meaningful and communicative annual school progress report. The role of the report as a mechanism to increase parental understanding of the educational program and process was stressed. The mandated areas to be included in the report were also discussed. The workshop occurred in May of 1988, prior to the preparation of the annual school progress report by the writer and the annual school report committee.

The ninth workshop session focused on developing a comprehensive and communicative parent-student handbook which clearly outlined school policies and procedures. The workshop occurred in May of 1988, and the writer and committee of teachers worked on the development of the handbook during the teacher post-planning days in June of 1988.

The tenth and final workshop session included the administration of the evaluative survey to the classroom staff, relating to the school-home communication program. (See Appendix C) This session occurred in June of 1988 and included a time for evaluative discussion from the staff. The program's goals were reevaluated and a sense of closure was established.

Report of the Action Taken

The report of the action taken section of this chapter has as its purpose the detailed description of the implementation phase of the practicum. This is included to allow for replication and duplication by others facing a similar problem. (See Appendix F) The plan of action implemented included: (1) the communication training program conducted with the instructional staff and (2) the development of the revised annual school progress report, parent-student handbook, weekly progress report, grade-level newsletter, open-house newsletter, summer extended day newsletter, mid-quin tele-conference and the video magazine.

There were no significant difficulties encountered during implementation and the plan of action (the solution strategy) was carried out as proposed. Concomitant outcomes are presented in Chapter Five.

Session one occurred in November of 1987, and was scheduled for a Wednesday afternoon, as students were dismissed one hour early each Wednesday. The session was projected to last approximately one hour. The teachers all

received a copy of the communication training program outline prior to this session. The outline was reviewed at the session. During session one the program was explained and discussed (as per the outline) and the 36 teachers who served on the four committees (video magazine, school newsletter, annual school report, parent-student handbook) were selected. The long range plans for further improving and increasing school-home communication and for enhancing the school-home relationship were also discussed, with this program being the first step in the improvement process being a critical point.

Session two occurred in December of 1987, and lasted approximately one hour. The need for a school-wide bi-weekly newsletter was examined and discussed, along with the format of the newsletter, the function of the newsletter committee, and a brainstorming activity to devise ways to increase school-wide involvement in the development of the newsletter. The newsletter committee and selected students met with the writer twice each month to assist with the development of the newsletter.

Session three occurred in December of 1987, on a Wednesday afternoon, and lasted approximately one hour. The rationale for a weekly grade-level progress report was discussed. Each grade-level designed the weekly progress report form they wished to utilize and determined how achievement, effort and conduct would be communicated to parents.

The rationale for not having the reports signed and returned (except in special cases) was explained as follows: the parents would know on which day of the week progress reports were expected home and it would be their responsibility to follow-up with the teacher if the weekly progress report did not arrive home on the designated day they were sent home.

The multiple uses of the weekly progress report were explored and a discussion on the appropriate use of narrative comments took place as well.

Session four occurred in December of 1987, and lasted approximately one hour. The need for a video-magazine was examined and discussed. The planning, development and production processes were covered, along with the presentation schedule (January, February, March, May). The video committee met each month to plan and produce the video magazine. The writer served on the video committee. The school's curriculum resource teacher coordinated the video magazine committee.

Session five occurred in January of 1988, and lasted approximately one hour. The goals of the mid-term tele-conference were discussed along with plans for the effective achievement of the tele-conferences. The conference documentation form was reviewed. Logistical factors and concerns were discussed along with follow-up procedures.

Session six occurred in January of 1988, on a Wednesday afternoon, prior to the end of the grading period (end of January). Session six lasted approximately one hour. The

need for a grade-level newsletter was explored, the areas to be included were discussed and the newsletter information collection form was distributed and examined. The information collection forms, when completed, were given to the secretary to be typed, copied and returned to the teachers to attach to the report card of each student.

Session seven occurred the first Wednesday of the month, in February of 1988. This session lasted approximately one hour. The need for an open-house newsletter was discussed, the appropriate purposes of an open-house examined and the guidelines for the development of an open-house newsletter were also discussed. Each grade-level developed an open-house newsletter for the second semester (February, 1988) open-house and the fall (September, 1988) open-house.

Session eight occurred in March of 1988, on a Wednesday afternoon and lasted approximately one hour. The rationale for a meaningful annual school report was analyzed, along with the legally mandated aspects of the report, as well as ways to increase the communicative impact of the report and the methods to utilize the report as a vehicle to increase parental awareness, understanding, support and involvement in the school program. The writer met with the annual school report committee, separately, to develop committee responsibilities and to develop a timeline for completion of tasks, prior to July 1, 1988 (when the final draft of the report was due at the district office). The committee met

as needed to complete the report.

Session nine occurred in April of 1988, and lasted approximately one hour. This session covered the development of a communicative parent-student handbook. Content, format and parental information needs were examined. The practicum student met with the handbook committee, seperately, to develop committee responsibilities and to develop a timeline for completion. The final draft of the handbook, which was in a folder format, was taken to the print shop in July of 1988. The committee met as needed to complete the required tasks.

Session ten occurred during the first week of June 1988, after school, and lasted approximately one hour. The evaluation instrument was administered and collected, and a discussion on the impact of the program was facilitated by the writer. During the 1988-89 pre-planning session for teachers, the program was reviewed by the writer for the staff and plans for continued implementation established.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results obtained in the practicum are presented in relation to the two outcome objectives described in Chapter Three. The format for the presentation of the results will include a narrative description of the actual outcome in relation to the projected outcome, a graphic depiction of this projected- actual outcome relationship, and related discussion.

This chapter will also include conclusions, recommendations, concomitant outcomes and plans for networking and dissemination.

Objective One: Results Obtained

The first objective specified for the practicum was to improve school-home communication to a level perceived by parents to be satisfactory. The 1987-88 annual parent survey served as the evaluation instrument. The projected outcome expectation was that 70% of the parents responding to this survey would rate school-home communication as being perceived to be satisfactory or very satisfactory, as a result of the implementation of the solution strategy.

Each student in the school was given an annual survey to take home for parents to complete. There were 609 students enrolled when the surveys were distributed and 284 surveys were returned. This represents a response rate of 47%. The response rate may be somewhat skewed, as families with more than one child enrolled received a survey from

each child and typically returned only one survey, regardless of the number of children in the family.

Analysis of the returned parent surveys revealed that 68% (193) of the responding parents perceived school-home communication as being "satisfactory" and 24% of the responding parents (68) perceived school-home communication as being "very satisfactory". This represents a favorable perception of school-home communication by 92% of the parents who responded to the annual survey. The outcome objective projected that 70% of the responding parents would have a favorable perception of school-home communication and the actual outcome was that this projection was exceeded by 22%, which is substantially above expectation. Further analysis indicated that 6% of the responding parents (17) were "not sure" if the school-home communication program improved the communication link to a level perceived to be satisfactory. Finally, 2% of the responding parents (6) indicated that they did not believe that the school-home communication program improved the communication link.

The following pie chart depicts, by percent, the perceptions of parents who responded to the annual survey, in relation to the impact of the communication improvement program on the school-home communication link.

OBJECTIVE #1
IMPROVEMENT IN SCHOOL-HOME COMMUNICATION

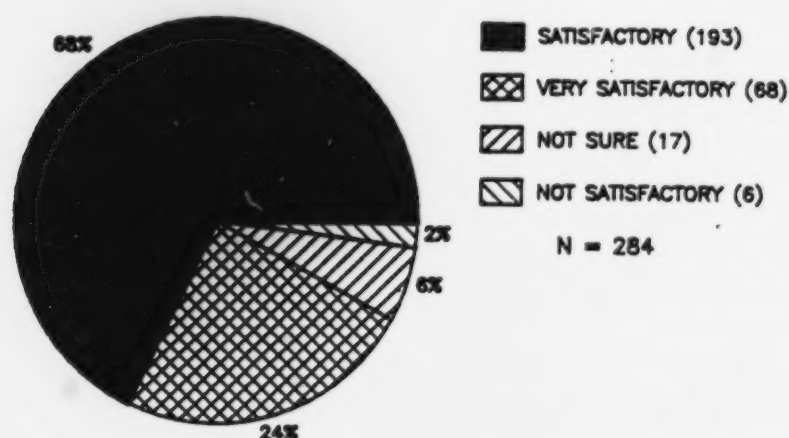


FIGURE 1

Discussion

The 92% favorable response perception represents a substantial improvement in the communication link between the school and the home. In further analyzing the results obtained, in relation to this objective, it appeared likely that the total array of communication strategies utilized provided the specific techniques which were most appropriate and effective for addressing the problem and its identified causal factors. The targeted blend of communication techniques which collectively comprised the solution strategy appeared likely to have been a major factor in how parents perceived the status of the communication link. Cause and effect cannot be directly attributed, due to the problem-solving design utilized in the practicum process, although it was the judgement of the writer's director, the P.T.A. President, the Local School Advisory Council and the writer that the favorable parental perceptions indicated on the annual surveys were in large part due to the solution

strategy implemented in response to the problem of unsatisfactory communication between the school and the home.

The results obtained in relation to this objective tended to corroborate the assertion of Gotts and Purnell (1985) that the communication link with parents could be impacted and improved through a carefully developed communication program which utilized written and personal strategies that addressed the specific and unique variables present in the existing communication link. The targeted array of communication techniques which comprised the solution strategy were selected on the basis of the specific needs which existed in the school-home communication link.

The results obtained for objective number one also tended to verify the results of action research conducted by Paulas (1984) which indicated that a comprehensive and targeted communication program with parents could improve the communication relationship and the level and type of involvement and support the school received from parents.

On balance, the results obtained for this objective exceeded the projected outcome expectation, appeared likely to be highly related to the implementation of the solution strategy, and were in agreement with the literature relative to this problem area.

Objective Two: Results Obtained

This objective projected that 70% of the parents responding to the 1987-88 annual parent survey would rate the school-home relationship as being improved, in some way,

as a result of the communication improvement program (solution strategy) that was implemented.

Analysis of the returned surveys (284) revealed that 74% (210) of these parents felt that the school-home relationship was in some way improved as a result of the communication improvement program. The outcome expectation of a 70% favorable rating was exceeded by 4%. Further analysis of the returned surveys indicated that 6% of the responding parents (17) indicated that they perceived "no improvement" in the school-home relationship as a result of the school-home communication program, and that 20% of the responding parents (57) indicated that they were "unsure" if the communication improvement program enhanced the school-home relationship.

The following pie graph depicts the perceptions of the responding parents, by percent, in relation to the impact of the communication improvement program on the school-home relationship.

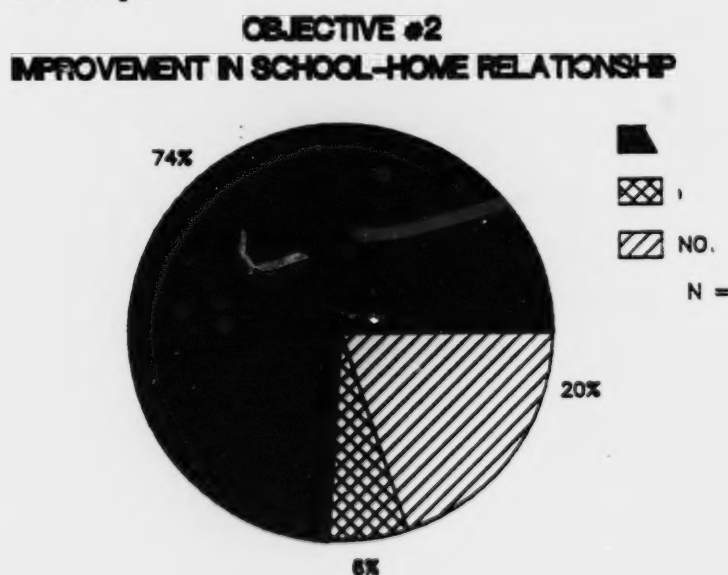


FIGURE 2

Discussion

The 74% favorable response perception exceeded expectation and represented a substantial perceived improvement in the school-home relationship, in some part due to the communication improvement program which was implemented. In further analyzing this outcome, it appeared likely that the solution strategy was a major factor in establishing a parental perception that improved communication, in some way improved the overall school-home relationship. Causation cannot be established due to the design of the practicum model, although it was the judgement of the P.T.A. President, the Local School Advisory Council, and the writer's supervisor and the writer that the parental perception of an improved relationship was in part due to improved communication between the school and the home, and was accurate and reflected a real outcome of the solution strategy.

The results obtained relative to the impact of improved communication on the school-home relationship are in agreement with the research Brookover (1982) conducted on this subject. Brookover found that a sound school-home communication program was critical to the development of a climate which encouraged involvement and trust.

Epstein (1987) identified school-home communication as being a critical variable in establishing an atmosphere where parental involvement could be developed. Epstein further asserted that the school principal played a key role in establishing and maintaining an effective communication

program and in nurturing and maintaining the relationship which existed between parents and the school. This research corroborates the outcome seen in relation to the impact of effective communications on the school-home relationship. The role of the principal appears to be a pivotal role in this process, as the principal is the primary person at the school who has the power and authority to establish the necessary processes and climate to improve communications and to link improved communications to the broader area of the school-home relationship.

On balance, the results obtained for this objective exceeded the projected outcome expectation, appeared likely to be highly related to the impact of the solution strategy and the role the writer played as the school principal, and were in agreement with the literature relative to this problem area.

Conclusions

Upon analyzing the results obtained from this practicum, the following conclusions were drawn and are presented.

(1) Improving the communication link with parents required the active leadership of the principal and the direct support and involvement of the school staff. The communication improvement process cannot be a "top-down" mandated initiative, as ownership must be present in order for the program to be effective and to thrive.

(2) The design of the communication improvement program must

be based on the specific and unique variables and needs of the existing and desired communication link. The literature clearly indicated that a blend of targeted approaches and techniques was the most effective strategy to be employed to improve the communication link. Written, personal and other creative approaches were supported as being effective methodologies when they were integrated into a comprehensive plan which addressed the unique needs and variables of the existing and desired communication link.

(3) The improvement of communication with parents can impact the existing and desired school-home relationship. An effective communication link is one element in the larger area of the school-home relationship. The actual impact that an effective communication link has on the perceived school-home relationship is substantial. The improvement in the school-home relationship can lead to increased parental involvement and support in various aspects of the total school program.

(4) The concomitant effects of this communication and relationship improvement program were many and varied. The specific concomitant effects which occurred as a result of this practicum are outlined as follows.

- The video magazine committee wrote two grants to obtain a cam-corder and assorted video equipment.
- The P.T.A. assisted in the establishment of a school television studio from which morning announcements were broadcast to classroom television sets. A

- different class was responsible to present announcements each week and parents were invited to view their children as they presented these announcements.
- The school and the P.T.A. co-sponsored the funding of a project to place a color television in each classroom so the full impact of video technology could be enhanced.
 - The medium of video was utilized to facilitate open-house presentations relating to staff, school policies and practices, special events and activities, and other information parents were interested in receiving.
 - The tele-conference format has led the kindergarten team to have evening parent conferences to distribute report cards. The first grade team of teachers have implemented this strategy in place of tele-conferences.
 - The communication improvement program has been utilized by the district in its Preparing New Principals Program, as a model program in the areas of improving climate and communication patterns.

These concomitant effects were unanticipated, yet were significant and positive occurrences which were directly related to the implementation of the solution strategy. The impact of a solution strategy can extend beyond the projected areas of influence and lead to a myriad of opportunities for further problem-solving and overall program enhancement, as well as professional growth in a wide range of areas.

Recommendations

The recommendations presented are designed to assist other professionals who may desire to apply a similar solution strategy to the problem of inadequate school-home communication.

(1) Any program implemented must be the outcome of a carefully designed assessment of existing needs. The analysis needs to include examination of variables found in the internal and external environments.

(2) The program needs to be tailor made to fit the specific requirements of the existing situation. There is not one type of approach that will work equally well in all situations.

(3) The school principal needs to assume an active leadership position in the improvement process. Symbolic gestures are not sufficient, as direct involvement is necessary to mobilize the efforts of others.

(4) It is essential that parent/community information needs be assessed and addressed. It is not appropriate to unilaterally determine what parents and the community need in terms of information.

(5) The improvement process requires change, and the types and amounts of change attempted need to be carefully planned, so anxiety is not raised to an unacceptable level. Sensitivity is the key element in managing this variable.

(6) The improvement process can lead to numerous challenges and opportunities. Some of these may be projected and

others may arise unexpectedly during the implementation process. It is crucial to capitalize on these opportunities and challenges and to facilitate the growth of leadership skills in staff members as opportunities for empowerment arise.

Plans for Furthering This Solution

Plans for furthering this solution strategy in the writer's work setting include: (1) further utilizing the video technology format to enhance communication within the school and with parents and community groups. This will include the development and submission of grant proposals to obtain more video equipment in order to increase the range of uses of this technology. (2) Implementing the nightly report card conference in grades one through five. This has been a very successful strategy for the Kindergarten team which has promoted direct parent contact and has encouraged parents to get into their child's classroom. This is a direct outcome of the tele-conference utilized in the solution strategy.

Plans for Dissemination and Networking

Plans for dissemination and networking include sharing the results of this practicum with other elementary school principals in a monthly cluster meeting. This practicum has been shared with assistant principals in the district's Preparing New Principals Program and will be offered as a mini-workshop at the district's 1989 summer leadership institute for school managers.

These dissemination and networking strategies focus on district-level presentations to audiences which have a

professional interest in the areas this practicum emphasized.

The practicum student will develop and submit, for possible publication, an article describing how this pervasive educational problem was addressed through the implementation of this practicum. This article will be submitted to the F.A.S.A. (Florida Association of School Administrators) Journal, as this journal seeks articles from practitioners as well as from those involved in academic situations.

The development and submission of an article to this particular journal provides an opportunity to disseminate information relative to this practicum, to an audience of practitioners and university-based persons within the state of Florida.

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Parent Attitude Survey

Directions: We would like you to fill out this attitude survey. It will help us know how you feel about your child's school life. Your answers will be kept private; there is no space for your name. By answering the questions as honestly as you can, it will help us understand what you think about the school. We can use this information to make our school a better place to be. Remember there are no right or wrong answers.

Read and circle the number beside each question as follows:

- 1- means that you are VERY SATISFIED
 2- means that you are GENERALLY SATISFIED
 3- means that you are GENERALLY DISSATISFIED
 4- means that you are VERY DISSATISFIED
 5- means that you DO NOT KNOW

For example, the response to the following sample item indicates that the person is GENERALLY SATISFIED with the overall quality of instruction your child received.

The overall quality of instruction. 1 2 3 4 5

When finished with the survey please return it to the school. Thank you for your help in filling out the survey.

A. Communication with Home

- | | | | | | |
|--|------|-------|-------|------|-----|
| 1. The report card format. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. The school newsletter | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| *Number of Respondents | (26) | (110) | (166) | (76) | (0) |
| *% of Respondents | 7% | 29% | 44% | 20% | 0% |
| 3. The school's annual progress report | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Frequency of parent conferences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Usefulness of parent conferences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6. Information from the teacher on how well my child is doing.

1 2 3 4 5

Discipline

7. School Rules

1 2 3 4 5

8. Overall student behavior

1 2 3 4 5

9. Fairness of the Principal

1 2 3 4 5

10. Fairness of other adult staff members

1 2 3 4 5

11. The Code of Student Conduct

1 2 3 4 5

C. School Environment

12. The appearance of the school

1 2 3 4 5

13. The food served in the lunchroom

1 2 3 4 5

14. The appearance of my child's classroom

1 2 3 4 5

15. The cleanliness of the school

1 2 3 4 5

Instruction

16. The individual attention given to my child

1 2 3 4 5

17. The interest level of the subjects offered

1 2 3 4 5

18. The amount of homework assigned

1 2 3 4 5

19. The overall quality of instruction

1 2 3 4 5

20. The textbooks utilized

1 2 3 4 5

21. The overall level of learning of my child

1 2 3 4 5

E. Support Services

22. Guidance Services offered

1 2 3 4 5

23. The school clinic

1 2 3 4 5

24. The school library

1 2 3 4 5

25. The helpfulness of the office staff

1 2 3 4 5

My child is in grade 4

APPENDIX B

1987-88 PARENT SURVEY ON COMMUNICATIONS

62

School to Home Communication Survey

S
A
M
P
L
E
Directions: We would like you to fill out this survey on how you feel about the communication the school provides you with as parents. Your input and feedback is very important to us, as we are always trying to maintain effective practices and improve in areas which need improvement. We have attempted to improve the communications you receive, through the implementation of the weekly progress report, the grade-level newsletter and the bi-weekly school newsletter, the mid-term tele-conference and our video magazine. Your honest feedback is very important so we can determine how effective we were in providing you with meaningful communication.

Read and circle the number beside each question as follows:

- 1- means that you Strongly Agree
- 2- means that you Agree
- 3- means that you are Not Sure
- 4- means that you Disagree
- 5- means that you Strongly Disagree

For example, the response to the following sample item indicates that the person AGREES with the Statement that the communication program for parents is effective.

The communication program for parents is effective.

1 2 3 4 5

Space has been included for you to add any narrative comments that you wish.

When you complete this survey please return it to the school. Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. Your input is very important.

A. Weekly Progress Report

63

1. The Weekly progress report kept me informed about my child's academic progress.

1 (2) 3 4 5

Comments: _____

2. The Weekly progress report kept me informed about my child's work habits.

1 (2) 3 4 5

Comments: _____

3. The weekly progress report kept me informed about my child's conduct.

1 (2) 3 4 5

Comments: _____

4. The format of the weekly progress report was easy to understand.

1 (2) 3 4 5

Comments: _____

5. The weekly progress report should be kept as a school to home communication tool.

(1) 2 3 4 5

Comments: _____

6. How could the weekly progress report be improved?

B. School Newsletter

64

7. The school Newsletter provides useful information to parents.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments: _____

8. The distribution of the school newsletter twice each month provided timely information.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments: *Holding room too!*

9. The areas included in the school newsletter were important to parents.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments: _____

10. The school newsletter provided a comprehensive overview of general school information.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments: _____

11. The school newsletter should be kept as a school to home communication tool.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments: _____

12. How could the school newsletter be improved?

C. Grade Level Newsletter

65

13. The grade level newsletter (that went home with each report card) kept me informed about previous grade level happenings and areas of study. 1 (2) 3 4 5

Comments: _____

14. S The grade level newsletter kept me informed about upcoming grade level happenings and areas of study. 1 (2) 3 4 5

Comments: A _____

15. The distribution of the grade level newsletter with each report card provided information in a timely manner. 1 (2) 3 4 5

Comments: M _____

16. The grade level newsletter is an effective way to provide parents with general information about the grade level of their child. 1 (2) 3 4 5

Comments: L _____

17. The grade level newsletter should be kept as a school to home communication tool. 1 (2) 3 4 5

Comments: E _____

18. How could the grade level newsletter be improved?

D. Parent-Student Handbook

, 66

19. The parent-student handbook provided useful and important information to parents.

Comments: Yes - very detailed ① 2 3 4 5

20. The alphabetic format of the parent-student handbook was easy to follow.

Comments: S 1 ② 3 4 5

21. School policies and procedures were clearly described in the parent student handbook.

Comments: M Good job 1 ② 3 4 5

22. The folder design of the parent-student handbook was more effective in providing information quickly than the previously used booklet format.

Comments: I Love this format ① 2 3 4 5

23. The parent-student handbook was comprehensive.

Comments: Very 1 ② 3 4 5

24. The parent-student handbook should be kept as a school to home communication tool.

Comments: E ① 2 3 4 5

25. How could the parent-student handbook be improved?

Change the color of the ink
used to print it

E. Tele-Conferences

26. The mid-term telephone conference was an effective way to share and receive information on my child.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

I like this
S

27. The personal discussion of information about my child's progress in achievement, effort and conduct, with the teacher was valuable to me.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

M

28. The mid-term telephone conference should be kept as a school-home communication tool.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

P
yes

29. How could the tele-conference system be improved?

Do it more often
L
E

F. Video Magazine Presentation

30. The video-magazine presentations were informative and interesting.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments: _____

31. The video-magazine should be kept as a communication strategy.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments: _____

32. How could the video-magazine be improved?

M

P

L

E

G. Conclusion

33. Please indicate your degree of satisfaction with the OVERALL PROGRAM of School home communications.

Please check one:

- ☒ VERY SATISFACTORY
☐ SATISFACTORY
☐ UNSATISFACTORY
☐ VERY UNSATISFACTORY
☐ NOT SURE

Comments: All of the improvements
exceeded!
M

34. Do you feel that the Program of school-home communications has in some way improved the school-home relationship?

- ☐ YES
☐ NO
☒ NOT SURE

Comments: I don't know what this
really means (?)
E

MY CHILD IS IN GRADE 3rd

STAFF SURVEY ON SCHOOL-HOME COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

71

Staff survey on the Improving Communications with Parents Programs.

1: Strongly Agree 3: Not sure 5: Strongly disagree
2: Agree 4: Disagree

1. The communications program has improved the school-home relationship.

① 2 3 4 5

Comments: Significantly

S

2. The grade-level weekly progress report was an effective way to communicate with parents about a child's achievement.

1 ② 3 4 5

Comments: Yes, but a lot of work

A

3. The grade-level weekly progress report was an effective way to communicate with parents about a child's conduct.

1 ② 3 4 5

Comments: _____

M

P

4. The grade-level weekly progress report was an effective way to communicate with parents about a child's work habits /effort.

1 ② 3 4 5

Comments: _____

L

E

5. The workshop sessions were generally beneficial to me as a professional educator.

1 ② 3 4 5

Comments: very informative

6. The workshop sessions had a carry-over value to the communication strategies utilized. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: _____

7. The parent-student handbook workshop was useful and informative. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: _____

8. The annual school report workshop was useful and informative. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: *I don't know we are*

responsible for so much

9. The direct involvement of the classroom instructional staff in the school-home communications program was beneficial to me as a professional educator. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: _____

10. I consider the activities contained in the communications improvement program a staff development function. 1 2 3 4 5

Comments: *I learned a lot*

11. My participation in the communications improvement program has increased my awareness of the total school program.

① 2 3 4 5

Comments: It was eye-opening

12. Feedback received from parents relative to the communication program was generally positive.

1 ② 3 4 5

Comments: S

13. Developing grade-level weekly progress reports and newsletters, with my grade level colleagues, fostered increased team work at my grade level.

1 ② 3 4 5

Comments: M It wasn't always easy

14. The weekly progress report should be continued next year.

1 ② 3 4 5

Comments: P parents love it

15. The grade-level newsletter should be continued next year.

1 2 ③ 4 5

Comments: E Do parents really read this?

16. Mid-term tele-conferences were effective in communicating with parents.

1 (2) 3 4 5

Comments:

A lot of work

17. The video magazine was an effective communication mechanism.

(1) 2 3 4 5

Comments:

S

Neat idea

18. The opportunity to have direct input and involvement in the total school communications process was professionally valuable.

1 (2) 3 4 5

Comments:

M

19. How could the communications program be improved?

Comments:

Leave it alone we are off to a good start

L

E

APPENDIX D

GRADE-LEVEL NEWSLETTER INFORMATION COLLECTION FORM

76

Grade Level 5

Quinmester 3rd quin

Grade-level Members:

Kem _____
Leah _____
Dee _____

1. General content areas to be covered:

Math: Long division, metrics

Language Arts: Poetry, Dictionary skills, Research.

Science: Form of energy

Social Studies: Crime & consequences

Enrichment Activities:

- A. Chorus performances
- B. Field trips
- C. Mock trial

3. Special activities or events:

- A. Field Day
- B.
- C.

4. General information for parents:

- A. Need to form planning committee
- B. for end of year luncheon
- C.

APPENDIX E

78

Tele-Conference Documentation Form

Teacher E. H. PrimaryConference Date February 1 April

Student

Parent
Called at:

Home

Work

Other

Outcome of
Tele-Conference

Student	Parent Called at:	Outcome of Tele-Conference
1. Chris	Home	will continue to follow up at home
2.		
3.		
4. Yousef	Home	parent will help with H/W.
5.		
6. Tanisha	Work	parent pleased w/ progress
7.		
8. Tony	Work	grandmother will look at daily Pass
9.		
10.		
11. Amy	Home	Parent pleased w/ call
12.		
13. Jeremy	Work	parent wanted to know more about mainstreaming
14.		
15.		
16.		
17.		
18.		
19.		
20.		

Communication Training Program OutlineSession OneGoals of Program

- (1) Improved written and personal communications with parents.
- (2) Improved school-parental relationship.
- (3) Increased direct involvement of the classroom instructional staff in written and personal school-home communication processes.

Session Content

1.1 Session Overview

- Why this program was being implemented
- Program goals
- Program components

1.2 Status of school-parental relationship

1.3 Direct involvement of classroom instructional staff in program (committee format)

1.4 Program Components (written)

- weekly grade - level progress reports
- open-house newsletter
- grade-level newsletter (one per quin)
- annual school progress report
- parent-student handbook
- Summer Extended Day Program Newsletter
- Bi-weekly school newsletter
- (Personal Strategies)
- Video Magazine

- Mid-Term Tele-conference

1.5 Selection of committee members (one member from each instructional team)

- Video magazine
- annual school report
- parent-student handbook
- Bi-weekly newsletter

(36 teachers were involved with committee work, as there were four different committees with nine different staff members on each committee)

- selection was voluntary

1.6 Long range plans for communication and relationship improvement.

1.7 Questions/ concerns, review of session

Session Two

2.1 Overview of Session Two

2.2 Why a bi-weekly school newsletter was needed.

2.3 Format of bi-weekly school newsletter

- general school-wide information
- special features
- information needs of parents
- communicative impact

2.4 Committee Orientation

2.5 Involving the entire school in the newsletter
(Brainstorming)

2.6 Questions/ concerns, review of session

Session Three

3.1 Overview of Session Three

- 3.2 Why a weekly grade-level (individual) progress report was needed.
- 3.3 Achieving grade-level consensus on report format
- 3.4 Areas included on report
 - achievement
 - conduct
 - effort
- 3.5 Report sent home, by all grade levels, on same day of week
- 3.6 Report was not to be returned (except in special cases)
- 3.7 Narrative comments on report
- 3.8 Multiple uses of report
 - conference requests
 - mid-quin progress notification (written verification)
 - general information to parents
- 3.9 Questions / concerns, review of session

Session Four

- 4.1 Overview of Session Three
- 4.2 Why a video-magazine was needed.
- 4.3 Purpose of video magazine
 - focus on children
 - share general school-wide information with parents
 - special events
 - information needs of parents

- communicative impact
- 4.4 Committee orientation / timelines / production logistics
- 4.5 Involving the entire school in the video magazine
- 4.6 Questions/ concerns, review of session

Session Five

- 5.1 Overview of Session Four
- 5.2 Why a mid-term tele-conference was being implemented
- 5.3 Purpose of tele-conference (Trust)
 - establishing school-home rapport
 - communicate something positive about child to parents
 - communicate an area of need to the parents, which they can help with (give concrete suggestion)
 - report to parents on child's achievement, behavior, effort
 - documentation of tele-conferences (share with principal)
 - follow-up
 - scheduling tele-conferences
- 5.4 Questions/ concerns, review of session

Session Six

- 6.1 Overview of Session Six
- 6.2 Why a grade-level newlsetter was needed
- 6.3 Distribution with each report card
- 6.4 Grade-level newsletter information collection form

- 6.5 All members of grade-level are to contribute to grade-level newsletter
- 6.6 Areas to be included in grade-level newsletter
 - content area concepts (general)
 - enrichment activities
 - special events
 - general grade-level information for parents
- 6.7 Questions/ concerns, review of session

Session Seven

- 7.1 Overview of Session Seven
- 7.2 Why an Open-House Newsletter was needed
- 7.3 Purpose of open-house
 - not individual conferences
 - general information
 - overview of grade-level expectations/ skills
 - content areas (general)
 - daily routine
 - classroom procedures
 - school procedures (general)
 - establish relationship with parents
 - address general parental questions
- 7.4 Development of open-house newsletter
 - distribute consistent information at grade-level
 - format
- 7.5 Questions/ concerns, review of session

Session Eight

- 8.1 Overview of Session Eight

- 8.2 Why a meaningful annual school progress report was needed
- 8.3 Legal requirements of report
- 8.4 Increasing the communicative impact of the annual school progress report
- 8.5 Utilizing the annual school progress report to increase parental awareness, understanding, support and involvement
- 8.6 Committee assignments
- 8.7 Timeline for preparation of report
- 8.8 Questions/ concerns, review of session

Session Nine

- 9.1 Overview of Session Nine
- 9.2 Why a comprehensive and communicative parent-student handbook was needed
- 9.3 Impact of format of handbook
- 9.4 Areas to be included in handbook
 - policies
 - procedures
 - calendar
 - P.T.A. information
- 9.5 Focusing on information needs of parents
- 9.6 Committee assignments
- 9.7 Handbook preparation timeline
- 9.8 Question/ concerns, review of session

Session Ten

- 10.1 Overview of Session Ten
- 10.2 Staff survey on value and effectiveness of program

10.3 Questions and concerns

10.4 Discussion and closure

Session Descriptions

Session One

This session focused on:

- (1) Orienting staff to why the program was needed.
- (2) Establishing the tone with the staff which was conducive to openness, sharing of ideas and facilitation of professional growth.
- (3) The examination of the link between communication and the school-parental relationship.
- (4) The utilization of committees to assist, directly, in program implementation.
- (5) Highlighting program goals.
- (6) Describing program components.
- (7) Selection of committee members.
- (8) Discussing how this particular program was a foundationally requisite step in the long term process of improving total communication with parents and improving the school-home relationship.

Session Two

Session Two focused on:

- (1) Discussing why a bi-weekly school newsletter was needed.
- (2) Discussing the format of the newsletter (school-wide general information, special features, information needs of parents, communicative

- impact).
- (3) Describing the functions and duties of the newsletter committee.
 - (4) Exploring ways to increase participation of school staff and students in development of the newsletter.

Session Three

Session three focused on:

- (1) Discussing why a weekly grade-level progress report was needed.
- (2) Discussing how to achieve grade-level consensus on report format.
- (3) Discussing the areas that were determined to be included in the weekly progress report (achievement, effort, conduct).
- (4) Deciding on a day of the week when all grade levels would send home weekly progress reports.
- (5) Discussing why weekly progress reports were not to be signed by parents and returned, except in special cases.
- (6) Highlighting how the weekly progress report could contain narrative comments when appropriate.
- (7) Discussing how the weekly progress report could be used as a mid-quin progress report, conference request form and to relay general information to parents.

Session Four

Session four focused on:

- (1) Discussing why a "video magazine" was being implemented as a communication mechanism with parents.
- (2) Discussing how the video magazine was to be planned, developed, produced and shown.
- (3) Developing video magazine committee responsibilities.
- (4) Discussing the potential the video magazine had to communicate with parents (utilizing an alternative communication strategy).
- (5) Discussing the role of the curriculum resource teacher in the process.
 - planning
 - filming
 - coordinating

Session Five

Session five focused on:

- (1) Discussing why telephone conferences (at the mid-term) with parents were being implemented.
- (2) Discussing the importance of the tele-conference in improving the school-home relationship.
- (3) Discussing the logistics of the tele-conference.
 - Progress (Academic, Effort, Conduct)
 - Something positive about the child
 - Something parents can help with at home
 - Relationship improvement
 - Follow-up
 - Documentation of tele-conference (shared with

principal)

- Documentation form

- (4) Planning the tele-conference

Session Six

Session six focused on:

- (1) Discussing why a grade-level newsletter was needed.
- (2) Describing the distribution schedule (with each report card).
- (3) Examining the grade-level newsletter information collection form.
- (4) Discussing the concept of equity in developing the newsletter. All team members assisted in preparing the newsletter.
- (5) Highlighting the specific areas to be included with each grade-level newsletter. (General content area information, enrichment activities, special events, specific grade-level information for parents.)

Session Seven

Session seven focused on:

- (1) Analyzing why an open-house newsletter was needed.
- (2) Examining the appropriate functions of the open-house.
- (3) Determining strategies on how to develop the open-house newsletter.

Session Eight

90

Session eight focused on:

- (1) Examining why a meaningful annual school progress report was needed.
- (2) Highlighting the legal requirements of the annual school report.
- (3) Exploring how the communicative impact of the annual school progress report would be maximized.
- (4) Analyzing how the report would be utilized to increase parental awareness, understanding, support and involvement.
- (5) Developing a work schedule for the annual school report committee.

Session Nine

Session nine focused on:

- (1) Examining why a comprehensive and communicative parent-student handbook was needed.
- (2) Analyzing the potential impacts the handbook format would have.
- (3) Discussing the areas which were to be included in the handbook (policies, procedures, calendar, P.T.A. information).
- (4) Examining the information needs of parents in relation to the areas which were determined to be included in the handbook.
- (5) Developing a work schedule for the handbook committee.

Session Ten

Session ten focused on:

- (1) Evaluating the value of the program (professional growth, school improvement, unanticipated outcomes) and the need to continue to work on the communication link.
- (2) Establishing closure with the staff in relation to the training.